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## Two case studies of local library provision: I Norwich

DAVID STOKER

Norwich has been a home to libraries for more than 900 years, and was both a pioneer in the establishment of an independent municipal library in the seventeenth century and the first municipality to adopt the Public Libraries Act in the nineteenth century.<sup>1</sup> Yet until recently the libraries of the eighteenth century have remained largely undocumented, although for much of this period Norwich was the first or second most important English provincial city, and England's largest manufacturing centre prior to the industrial revolution.

### The cathedral library

Of the several monastic and parochial libraries in existence during the middle ages, virtually nothing survived the Reformation. The remains of the cathedral library were finally dispersed in 1574,<sup>2</sup> and the library building was demolished.<sup>3</sup> In 1673 the chapter ordered the creation of a new library in the audit chamber, but it was not until 1681, following the appointment of an energetic young canon named Humphrey Prideaux, that any concrete action was taken. The dean agreed to contribute £20 and each canon £10 in money or books towards the formation of a new collection.<sup>4</sup> Prideaux remained at the cathedral for forty-three years, subsequently as archdeacon of Suffolk and dean. He was an able administrator, who established the new library, secured the appointment of a Mr Paul as library-keeper with a salary of 20 shillings in 1710,<sup>5</sup> and reorganised the chapter archives.<sup>6</sup> Various entries in his diaries refer to gifts of books and money enabling a gradual expansion during the early decades of the eighteenth century,<sup>7</sup> until in 1722 he was able to record: 'The Library being too straitened conveniently to containe the books therein already placed an order was made that it should be enlarged.'<sup>8</sup>

In 1691 John Moore was appointed bishop – one of the foremost book-collectors of his age. He took no apparent interest in his cathedral library, but

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rather retained '2 or 3 rooms' of books from his own collection at his palace in Norwich.<sup>9</sup> However, Moore had a scholarly young chaplain named Thomas Tanner who had previously worked as a cataloguer at the Bodleian Library. Tanner was employed to buy books, to organise the bishop's library, and as writing master to his daughters. When he married Moore's elder daughter in 1701 he was appointed chancellor of his father-in-law's diocese, and moved to Norwich.<sup>10</sup> After using the libraries of Oxford and London, Tanner soon found that life in Norwich would not assist his studies, particularly once his father-in-law was translated to Ely: 'One great discouragement to me here is that we have nothing in this town that serves the name of a Public Library, and the *Supellex literaria* in private hands diminishes dayly.'<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless Tanner made the best of a bad job and began taking an interest in the running of the cathedral collection. His preoccupations with topographical and church history are apparent in many of the purchases which he made in 1709/10 on behalf of the cathedral, including Brady's *History of England*, Somner's *Antiquities of Canterbury*, Barnes's *History of Edward the Third*, Plot's histories of Oxfordshire and Staffordshire, and Burton's history of Leicestershire.<sup>12</sup>

During his thirty years in Norwich, Tanner was an avid collector of books and manuscripts, and took an active part in the local antiquarian community. He was also a patron of the City Library. At one point he may have intended to leave at least part of his collections to the cathedral library, but after 1709 he seems to have become more interested in the City Library. In 1731 he was appointed bishop of St Asaph, and ultimately the whole of his collections went to the Bodleian Library.<sup>13</sup> However, if the cathedral did lose the Tanner manuscripts, it did benefit from a legacy of several hundred books of 'theology, history, the classics, law, politics, and many volumes of pamphlets' from the prebendary Nicholas Penny in 1745.<sup>14</sup> Thus when in 1775 the first manuscript catalogue of the new collection was compiled there were in the region of 1,500 titles, reflecting the full range of clerical interests and tastes of the time.

Little is known of the operation of the cathedral library during the eighteenth century, but there is a set of rules dating from 1818.<sup>15</sup> From these it is clear that it was a lending library for cathedral office-holders, with the dean and prebendaries having superior borrowing rights to those of the minor canons, chapter clerk and organist. Loans were entered in a ledger and keys to the library were held by the dean, prebendaries and librarian. By 1829 the collection had grown to around 3,200 volumes, but this was largely as the result of a substantial donation in 1817.<sup>16</sup>

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### Parochial libraries

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries there are isolated references to the parochial library in the church of St Peter Mancroft, which seems to have been sufficiently large in 1682 to warrant purchase of 'A booke to make a catalogue of ye bookes in ye library'.<sup>17</sup> However by the 1740s the historian Francis Blomefield refers only to 'the remains of the library, which was formerly over the north porch'.<sup>18</sup> Likewise a parochial library was founded in St Andrew's parish in 1586, which was still in existence in 1628 when a list of books was compiled.<sup>19</sup> The antiquary John Kirkpatrick (1680–1725) recalled 'a library of some of ye first reformers, commentaries, etc.'. <sup>20</sup> By the 1740s the collection had dwindled to the 'several old books' in the south vestry again described by Blomefield.<sup>21</sup> Around eighty-two works were given to the parish church of St Martin at Oak by the vicar, Ephraim Megoe, between 1767 and 1781 and the collection was kept in the vestry and catalogued. By 1829, 400 items were recorded.<sup>22</sup> There is evidence for nine similar small parochial collections in Norwich, often in the form of individual items surviving from a desk library: these are listed in Michael Perkin's *Directory*.<sup>23</sup>

Parochial libraries were sufficiently common in the Norwich diocese to warrant Bishop Charles Trimmell to add three questions concerning their upkeep to his visitation articles of 1716:

Have you any Parochial Library in your Church or Parish?  
Is there any abuse in the management of the same?  
Is there a Catalogue of the Books belonging to the same deliver'd into the Bishop's Court?<sup>24</sup>

### The City Library

The Norwich City Library was founded in 1608, and housed over the porch of St Andrew's Hall. It was the first independent civic library after the Reformation. During the seventeenth century it went through two periods of growth and development (1608–34 and 1657–66), each followed by years of decline and neglect.<sup>25</sup> In the last decade of the seventeenth century there was again a revival of interest following the legacy of 142 volumes by Richard Ireland, rector of Beeston, in 1692. In parallel with the cathedral library, the first decade of the eighteenth century saw considerable development, with an enthusiastic group of users, encouraging further gifts. Thus the library-keeper, Joseph

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Brett, compiled *A catalogue of the books in the library of the city of Norwich*, in 1706,<sup>26</sup> describing the 923 volumes as follows:

upon the first Foundation of this Library, many great Benefactions . . . were given by the Magistrates, Gentlemen and Tradesmen of this City, by which means, here is no inconsiderable Collection of Divinity Book, for that time especially . . . And it must not be dissembled, that an Eye to this, was the great motive and main end of Publishing this Catalogue.<sup>27</sup>

The members sold one of their duplicate titles to pay for their catalogue,<sup>28</sup> which attracted many further donations in subsequent years. Bishop John Moore gave three volumes, Thomas Tanner five, and Dean Prideaux the first of several gifts.<sup>29</sup> Then in 1714 Thomas Nelson, rector of Morston, left his library of 570 volumes. The growing library also began to attract non-clerical members, including two of Thomas Tanner's antiquarian friends, Benjamin Mackerell and John Kirkpatrick.

Under rules dating from 1657 the collection was for reference purposes only, but in May 1716 permission was granted 'to render ye Library more usefull' by loaning items, subject to care being taken by 'the Library Keeper that there be no loss of the Books'.<sup>30</sup> Mackerell later expressed his disapproval of the management of the collection, in his unpublished history of Norwich:

For some few years it has been a Lending Library and some persons have had books two or three years long together contrary to an order to the contrary. There is no salary given by the City for any one to take care & the charge of the Books upon him. Only the keys thereof are left at the House of the Clark of St Andrews parish, and any man may be admitted that will but give him twelve pence a quarter. But unless the Corporation would be at the expence of a salary for any sober discreet person to take the charge of the said books upon himself & have the sole custody of them, and pecuniary mulcts inflicted upon such as break the orders already made, there is little hopes of keeping the books thereof in any good order long together.<sup>31</sup>

Mackerell's opportunity to institute reform came in June 1724, when he was appointed library-keeper.<sup>32</sup> He tightened up adherence to the regulations, and solicited yet more donations. His greatest coup was in persuading his antiquarian friends to leave their own collections to the City Library. Thus Thomas Tanner gave over 100 books in 1726 and indicated plans ultimately to leave his entire Norfolk collections. Kirkpatrick and Le Neve likewise undertook to leave substantial parts of their collections.

Kirkpatrick was the first of the group to die, in 1728, leaving over 200 early printed books and manuscripts and his collection of coins and medals. His

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valuable manuscript collections for the history of Norwich were also left to his brother Thomas during his lifetime, and thereafter to the city. Had the City Library likewise received the thousands of books and manuscripts in the Le Neve collection as their owner intended, and later those Tanner manuscripts relating to Norfolk, it would have become an enormously valuable resource for the history of the East Anglian region. However this was not to be. Le Neve died in 1729 leaving an imperfect will. His Norfolk and Suffolk collections were retained by the antiquary Thomas Martin, one of the two executors, who had married Le Neve's widow. Thomas Tanner, the second executor, was by then bishop of St Asaph and powerless to do anything about it. This may be why he altered his plans, leaving his entire collections to the Bodleian Library.<sup>33</sup>

The acquisition of the Kirkpatrick collection provided an excellent reason for the compilation of a new library catalogue,<sup>34</sup> and in October 1730 Mackerell advertised in the Norwich press recalling all books, and encouraging further donations.<sup>35</sup> Further gifts were received between 1730 and the summer of 1733, when the catalogue appeared. Edmund Prideaux, the son of Dean Prideaux, donated sixty titles in 1730 and Mackerell himself donated a further thirteen in 1731.<sup>36</sup> At the same time Mackerell sought to introduce new library rules limiting the number of books to be loaned, and the maintenance of proper loan records. He also instituted an annual charge, and additional charges for the loss or damage of books, and an annual recall of all books.

Some members objected to the new rules, and for several months in 1731/2 they managed to remove Mackerell from office, pointing to an existing but long-forgotten rule about annual elections of a library-keeper, and then nominating their own candidate.<sup>37</sup> However on 15 April 1732 Mackerell was again signing himself 'Bibliothecarius' and had presumably been reinstated. His new regulations were passed by the Norwich Assembly, in February 1733,<sup>38</sup> and were printed as a foreword to his catalogue. A committee established to 'examine into the state of the library' also recommended annual inspections, an annual subscription of one shilling plus a further quarterly payment of one shilling, and the maintenance of a register of loans.<sup>39</sup>

Mackerell's catalogue of 1733 was orderly and well executed, dealing with both the books and the manuscripts in the collection.<sup>40</sup> He notes that Brett's 1706 catalogue had attracted donations: 'for which Reason 'tis hoped that publishing and dispersing this Catalogue may have its well-intended design effected'. He also announced on the title page his intention of publishing 'an account of Mr John Kirkpatrick's Roman and other coins' (then still in the hands of Kirkpatrick's executor). Mackerell was working on this project in December 1735, when he wrote to Francis Blomefield seeking advice on the

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cost of its production,<sup>41</sup> but was then infirm, and he died in 1738 before it was completed. The coin collection was delivered to the City Library, where it was kept in locked cases but was later subject to neglect and pilfering, so that by 1840 everything of any value had been lost.<sup>42</sup>

Following Mackerell's death the City Library entered into a prolonged period of neglect. The minutes of regular meetings of members cease in 1733 and the record of donations ends in 1737. The collection of books remained intact, however, and the Assembly continued to keep the fabric of the library building in good repair, until the building over the porch was entirely replaced by a new structure between 1772 and 1775.<sup>43</sup> This appears to have been a catalyst to reorganise the collection, and in May 1775 Revd Pinchen was invited 'to regulate and make a catalogue of the City Library & to report the State thereof', and once again donations to the collection were recorded.<sup>44</sup>

Thereafter little is known about the operation of the library until it was taken into the custody of the members of the Norwich Public Library (which despite its name was a private subscription library) about 1801, and later moved to that library's new premises.<sup>45</sup> This arrangement continued until 1856, when the books were found to be in a 'very disorderly and dirty condition', and they were later taken back to form the nucleus of a new Free Public Library.<sup>46</sup>

### Circulating libraries

The eighteenth century saw the first libraries aiming to supply a more popular readership. There is evidence that in the 1730s and 1740s some Norfolk booksellers were loaning copies of new books to their customers for a small charge,<sup>47</sup> and the Norwich bookseller William Chase specifically advertised the practice in the *Norwich Mercury* for 20 September 1740.<sup>48</sup> Luke Hansard, who was an apprentice and journeyman printer in Norwich between about 1761 and 1770, also refers to three booksellers having 'extensive libraries': Berry, Wardlaw and Booth.<sup>49</sup> The library of Christopher Berry, his sons and grandsons (who were in business from 1747 until the 1820s) is not otherwise known, but in 1779 there is reference to 'a large circulating library' in a newspaper advertisement by Martin Booth.<sup>50</sup> Booth died in 1873 and his business was continued by his sons George and Thomas until 1792, when it was taken over by Robert Pearson.<sup>51</sup>

The *Norwich directory* of 1783 lists the library of William Wardlaw, in Dove Lane from 1749, who moved to larger premises in the Market Place in 1757. His circulating library was described as the largest in the city.<sup>52</sup> Wardlaw was, however, experiencing difficulties at this time and his wife Christina took over

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the business and moved back to Dove Lane. The business struggled on until 1795, when the elderly couple were both described as in hard circumstances.<sup>53</sup> William Wardlaw died in 1797, but his wife's circulating library was still in business in 1801.<sup>54</sup>

Martin Crockett opened a bookshop in Cook's Street in 1782 (subsequently known as Fye Bridge Street). Crockett's 'Lilliputian Library' was also advertised in the *Norfolk Chronicle* on 30 October 1784. He died in 1793, and his library was sold to James Robinson (*Norwich Mercury*, 12 July 1794) but by 1796 had gone out of business. A bookseller named William Lubbock bought binding materials from the trustees of James Robinson (*Norwich Mercury*, 17 September 1796) and may also have bought the stock of the library for in 1799 he advertised a new shop and circulating library (*Norwich Mercury*, 25 March 1799). He too was unsuccessful and the following year sold his stock to J. Hunt (*Norwich Mercury*, 13 September 1800). Hunt's Circulating Library later became known as the Minerva Circulating Library and survived until at least 1804.

A fifth circulating library, that of the bookseller Jacob Edwards, was advertised in the *Norwich Mercury*, 31 May 1783. Edwards died in 1790, and the library was soon afterwards discontinued.<sup>55</sup> Another library was announced by the bookseller William Tooke Robberds, in the *Norwich Mercury*, 6 January 1787, and survived well into the nineteenth century. Likewise about 1798 the bookseller William Parkinson Booth (a third son of Martin Booth) moved to new premises in the Market Place and established a library. This had grown to 5,000 volumes by 1809 and ultimately operated for about twenty-five years.<sup>56</sup>

The extent of Booth's business is illustrated by a surviving catalogue from 1802, listing 4,000 volumes in history, voyages, travels, biography, poetry, romances, novels, plays and miscellaneous books.<sup>57</sup> His charges ranged from 18 shillings per year for three sets of books or magazines, reduced to 17 shillings if limited to novels and plays only. Novels and plays could also be loaned at one penny per night and other books two pence. Booth likewise maintained a reading room for consulting daily papers and monthly reviews at one penny per day or 5 shillings per quarter. By the turn of the nineteenth century there were four or five well-established circulating libraries in Norwich and this number would grow over the next decade.

### Book clubs and subscription libraries

There is ample evidence for the existence of book clubs both in Norwich and in the surrounding area during the middle years of the eighteenth century.<sup>58</sup> These were often informal societies with limited memberships among the



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gentry and middle classes, created to share the costs of keeping up with new publications, with members meeting at an inn or a coffee-house.<sup>59</sup> One interesting Norwich example was the Society of United Friars founded in 1785 'for the promotion of intellectual culture and social fellowship'. The society had mock medieval ceremonial, with members dressed in the habits of monastic orders, and read antiquarian and philosophical papers. They also started a museum and formed a library of several hundred volumes, which was well regulated.<sup>60</sup> The society survived for forty-three years, and from 1793 it also organised large-scale charitable relief by means of soup kitchens.

However in 1784 a more traditional scheme was conceived for the creation of a self-governing Subscription Library. On 24 August a meeting 'for instituting a Public Library in this City' was held in the City Library room in St Andrews Hall. The meeting was called on the initiative of Philip Martineau, a famous local surgeon, and William Enfield, minister of a dissenting chapel. It was attended by the mayor and thirty-two notable citizens, but organisers had secured promises of a hundred one-guinea subscriptions before the meeting. The new society had an unlimited number of subscribers with 'equal right and power', and was run by a library committee of twelve members under a president (Martineau) and vice-president, which appointed John Tubby, a local schoolmaster, as librarian and secretary. After their initial subscription, members purchased a catalogue and a white metal ticket for 1s 6d and paid a further 6 shillings each year.

The Norwich Public Library was a great success, with membership trebling during the first year, and by 1800 there were more than 500 subscribers.<sup>61</sup> For the first fifteen years the institution was housed in St Andrew's Hall alongside the old City Library, and Tubby acted as the City Librarian. Around 1801 the members of the Norwich Public Library took over responsibility for the City Library, so that by 1825 the collections were catalogued in one sequence, although City Library books were distinguished by the letters C.L. As mentioned above, this arrangement continued until the foundation of the Free Public Library.

#### Other libraries

Institutional collections other than those noted may well have existed in the city, although there is no specific evidence for them. For example the Norwich Grammar School was established about 1542, but there is no evidence of any library before the nineteenth century. Similarly the establishment of specialist libraries serving professional groups other than the clergy – such as doctors

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or lawyers – is a feature of the first half of the nineteenth century rather than the eighteenth, but may have developed from eighteenth-century book clubs. Upon the foundation of the Norwich and Norfolk United Medical Book-Society in 1826, a collection of books was given by the physicians and surgeons of the Norfolk and Norwich Hospital. These were described as ‘part of a collection made many years since at that establishment’.

Thus during the course of the eighteenth century there were perhaps fifteen or more library collections available to the educated citizens of Norwich, in addition to the many private libraries which were advertised for sale at regular intervals by the city’s booksellers. There was, however, nothing to cater for the needs of most ordinary citizens. These collections were to come later.<sup>62</sup>

## NOTES

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- 2 M. R. James, *The wanderings and homes of manuscripts* (London, 1919), 66.
- 3 J. F. Williams and B. Cozens-Hardy (eds.), *Extracts from the two earliest minute books of the Dean and Chapter of Norwich Cathedral, 1566–1649*, *Norfolk Record Society* 24 (Norwich, 1953), 31.
- 4 A. J. Beck, *Norwich Cathedral library* (Norwich, 1986), 6.
- 5 Norfolk Record Office (hereafter NRO), DCN 115/2, Prideaux’s diary II, fol. 300.
- 6 I. Atherton and V. Morgan, ‘Revolution and retrenchment: the cathedral, 1630–1720’, in Atherton, *Norwich Cathedral*, 540–75, 563.
- 7 NRO, DCN 115/1, Prideaux’s diary I, fol. 163, II, fols. 246 and 285.
- 8 NRO, DCN 115/3, Prideaux’s diary III, fol. 92.
- 9 Letter to A. Charlett 25 June 1707, Bodleian Library MS Ballard 4, fol. 84.
- 10 M. J. Sommerlad, ‘The historical and antiquarian interests of Thomas Tanner 1674–1735’, unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford (1962).
- 11 Letter to A. Charlett 25 June 1707, Bodleian Library MS Ballard 4, fol. 84.
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- 13 D. Stoker, ‘The ill-gotten library of “Honest” Tom Martin’, in R. Myers and M. Harris (eds.), *Property of a gentleman* (Winchester, 1991), 90–111.
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- 19 F. R. Beecheno, *Notes on the church of St Andrew* (Norwich, 1883).
- 20 Perkin, *Directory*, 306.
- 21 Blomefield, *History of Norfolk*, vol. 2, 709.
- 22 Perkin, *Directory*, 308.

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- 25 J. Tilley, *A catalogue of the donations made to Norwich City Library 1608–1656* (Cambridge, 2000); D. Stoker, 'Doctor Collinges and the revival of Norwich City Library 1657–1664', *Library History* 5 (1980), 73–84; Wilkins-Jones, *Norwich city library*, is primarily a prosopographical study of the library membership.
- 26 NRO, Norwich Assembly Book 1707–45, fol. 178b.
- 27 *Catalogus librorum in Bibliotheca Norwicensi* (Norwich, 1883), iii–iv.
- 28 Stephen, *Three centuries*, 48.
- 29 *Ibid.*, 54–5. Prideaux donated two further volumes in 1717/18.
- 30 Stephen, *Three centuries*, 9; NRO, MS 4226, fol. 80. The borrowers register is now lost, but the rules were copied into the back of the minute-book, and are reproduced by Stephen, 9–10.
- 31 B. Mackerell, 'History of the city of Norwich both antient and modern', 2 vols. (1737): NRO, NNAS Safe II, c.1736/7, II, fol. 870.
- 32 NRO, MS 4226, fol. 92.
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- 34 The Norwich Assembly agreed to finance the printing of 600 copies of a new catalogue: NRO, Norwich Assembly Book 1707–45, fol. 178b.
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- 36 NRO, MS 4226.
- 37 D. Stoker, 'Benjamin Mackerell, antiquary librarian and plagiarist', *Norfolk Archaeology* 42 (1993/4), 1–12.
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- 39 Wilkins-Jones, *Norwich city library*, 319.
- 40 *A new catalogue of the books in the public library of the city of Norwich* (Norwich, [1733]). Items were arranged in a broad alphabetical classification scheme, and each title was allocated a shelf number. The catalogue was arranged alphabetically by author in columns showing the donor's name, author, title, date (where known), format, class and number.
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- 43 Wilkins-Jones, *Norwich city library*, 319–20, 322–3.
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- 45 Stephen, *Three centuries*, 13–14.
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- 52 *Norwich Mercury*, 6 August 1784.
- 53 *Norwich Mercury*, 11 April 1795.
- 54 T. Peck, *The Norwich directory* (Norwich, 1801).
- 55 *Norwich Mercury*, 30 October 1790.
- 56 *Norfolk Chronicle*, 23 December 1809; *Norwich Mercury*, 27 September 1823.
- 57 *W. Booth's catalogue of books belonging to his circulating library* (Norwich, 1802).
- 58 T. Fawcett 'An eighteenth century book club at Norwich', *Library*, 7th ser., 23 (1968), 47–50. Subscribers' lists for a Monday Book Club (1798) and the Magdalen Street Book Club (1800) also survive. Likewise book societies in Botesdale, Bungay, Diss, Eye and Thetford all subscribed to T. Martin's *History of the town of Thetford* (London, 1779).
- 59 Examples in Norwich being the White Swan Literary Society (c. 1775–9), or Tuck's Coffee House Book Club (1780/1).
- 60 NRO, COL 9/46/28–9 and COL 9/37.
- 61 Wilkins-Jones, *Norwich city library*, 342–51.
- 62 For early nineteenth century libraries, see M. A. Kay, 'Library provision in Norwich before 1850', unpublished MA dissertation, University of London (1974).